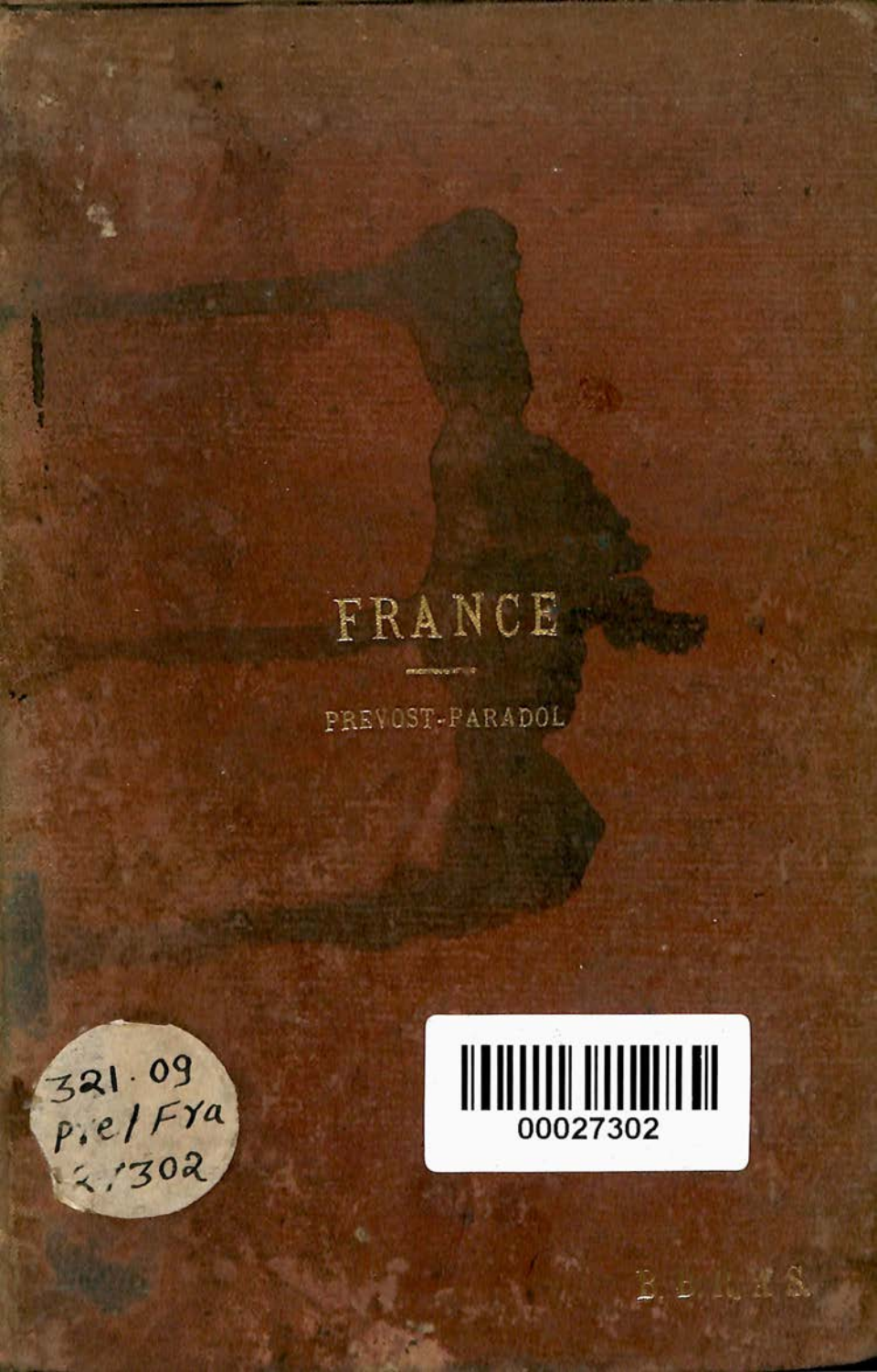

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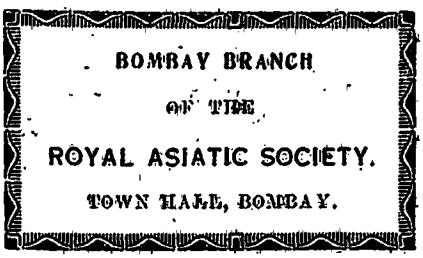

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FRANCE.

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FRANCE

BY

M. PREVOST-PARADOL

DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

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EDINBURGH
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS
1869

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS advertisement should only consist in heartfelt thanks for the cordial welcome with which I have been honoured in Scotland, and for the kind attention which these two lectures on France have received from a most enlightened and indulgent audience.

But I shall avail myself of the occasion to give a necessary explanation about the first of these two lectures, and to answer a question which has been raised about it by some of my distinguished hearers. "You have described accurately enough," I was told, "the moral state created in France by the habit of revolutions, but you did not make sufficiently clear the cause which breeds those frequent revolutions amongst you, and which shakes so often the soil of your land." Well, I confess that I have, in my first lecture, summed up rather briefly the cause of our perpetual revolutions, when I said that it was only a long, and, till the present day, fruitless seeking after

a good government. I could not reasonably attempt a full demonstration of that truth by giving to my hearers a complete account of the various governments which our revolutions had overthrown, and of the errors and faults which have brought them to their untimely end. But, to avoid leaving a matter of such importance in the shade, I shall insist here on two points: the first, that when we—the liberal French party as a whole—are speaking of a *good government*, we mean the same thing as the best men of England do, to wit, an Executive submitting in good faith to a Parliament elected by fair means. And the second point upon which I must insist is that, under its apparent fickleness of purpose and irritability of temper, France has never claimed or pursued any other blessing than the durable establishment of such a good government; and that, if the country has been driven so often to the painful extremity of a revolution, it is only because she has never been yet in peaceful possession of that first of all goods.

It is perhaps too usual in this country to accuse France of reckless impatience towards its governments, without taking time to consider whether this

country, wise and orderly as it is, would have shown, in a situation quite the same, more patience than France did. We cannot truly be reproached with the fall of the First Republic, which was brought down by a military conspiracy; nor with the fall of the First Empire, which was destroyed by Europe in arms, and which was—it will be confessed by any man in his senses—an intolerable government. As to our revolution of 1830, I would ask any Englishman what he thinks about the probable conduct of the English people, if, in the middle of a legal struggle to remove a ministry already condemned by the House, and at open war with Parliament, the *Gazette* were to publish regal orders dissolving a new-elected House of Commons before its first meeting, subverting the electoral law of the land, and suppressing the liberty of the press? Am I not entitled to say that James II. was sent away from your shores for lesser sins, and for less violent interference with the public law of the country? The Revolution of 1848 was certainly less justifiable; but, however, who knows how long and how patiently the temper of the English people would have endured the well-known meddling of the King with the direction of public affairs, especially

abroad ; his loud, obstinate, and active attachment to a ministry seven years old, and notoriously unpopular out of the House ; and finally, the constant refusal of an electoral reform in a country where 200,000 voters only were considered as fit representatives for thirty-five millions of men ? Moreover, if you look at that revolution of 1848 more closely, you will acknowledge soon that it was not an act of the free will of the whole nation, as in 1830, but rather an accident provoked by the blind security of the Crown, and by the narrowness of views of our so-called conservative party. But even if we are content to consider the revolution of February 1848 as a rash and unjust move of the French people, it is the only one of our many changes which is open to the reproach of recklessness and imprudence; for I don't think that the overthrow of the Second Republic can be fairly imputed to any will of the nation, when, on the contrary, the author of the deed could not perform it without killing, arresting, transporting, or exiling, the elected representatives of the people. I will now draw from that rapid review of the fall of our various governments since '89 the only conclusion that—except, *perhaps*, as to

the revolution of February 1848—all the revolutions which are quoted as proofs of our inconstancy and levity were brought upon us by events stronger than our will, and by such abuses and misuses of power as the English would have most likely resented and punished as we did.

Now I come to the present time, to answer another objection which was kindly presented to me also about my first lecture. I said, with my usual sincerity, that the Emperor was actually disposed to any sacrifice of his own opinions, and to any change of conduct, in order to reconquer the goodwill of the country; and I am asked why, with such a belief, I speak of a revolution as of a probable event, and without any marked abhorrence? I shall tender two plain answers to that question. The first is, that the establishment of the Second Empire was effected in a manner, and with such circumstances, as to leave in the mind of the present generation of my countrymen impressions much deeper and more vivid, and more lasting too, than our foreign neighbours are able to realise. It is very different, for example, if you read of a famine in China, or of a plague in old times—were it even

the description of the immortal Lucretius—or if you see with your own eyes, and touch with your own hands, dying friends in a famine or plague-stricken country. Well, no accounts by newspapers, no narratives by eye-witnesses, can convey to mere readers or hearers what the *coup d'etat* has eventually been to the generation which has seen in Paris that incredible and bloody assault of force against right. I was a student at the time, and many events and reflections have since passed over me; and, yet, if I bring to memory that sad day of my youth, if I let my mind dwell upon it for a moment, I am sure to feel my cheeks blushing with shame and my eyes filling with tears. Wisdom and reasonable interests must have their sway in this world; that I know and approve of; but feeling is something too, and it is not in this noble land of Scotland, filled, as it is, with the memory of so many martyrs to their faith, that I run the risk of not being understood, when I say that there are in our generation some memories, and some passions too, which no length of time, and no pressure of interest, can now eradicate from a French heart.

The other answer which I beg leave to give to

the before-mentioned question about a peace and alliance between a converted Emperor and our liberal party, is that trust is wanting on both sides. The Emperor is well aware that they dislike him; and, as to them, they will not, and cannot, have confidence in him.—Why not, if the Emperor is this time true and sincere, as his clear interest is to be?—That is a question which can be answered better, I think, by an example. When Napoleon I. contrived to escape from Elba, and was seen suddenly by Europe again occupying the French throne, he sent to every nation the most earnest assurances of peace: he was henceforward to be the most peaceful of sovereigns, and, as a mark of his absolute sincerity, he professed to accept without reserve the new territorial state of France, as the treaty of 1814 had established it. Well, there was every reasonable cause to believe him this time true and sincere; and however Europe and England first refused stubbornly to have anything to do with him, except to expel him from power, and to open again for this end the cruel and scarcely healed-up wounds of general war. Were you right or wrong?—it is not for me to say. The truth is, that you obeyed then an instinctive and insuperable feeling: you could not

like him and you could not trust him, and that feeling of yours sealed his fate. Do not, therefore, condemn beforehand the French liberal party, if they find it too hard to give to Napoleon III. that goodwill and trust which, in spite of your love for humanity and of your longing for peace, you refused to Napoleon I.

PREVOST-PARADOL.

EDINBURGH,
Saturday, Nov. 13, 1869.

I.

ON THE POLITICAL STATE OF FRANCE.

To speak before such an audience I regard, at the same time, as a great honour and a difficult trial. When the flattering offer of the Philosophical Institution reached me, I was as much afraid of coming as tempted to come. I am, indeed, rather known as a friend of British institutions, and perhaps more familiar with them than many of my countrymen, and I felt sure of a kind welcome amongst you; but, on the other hand, was it not presumptuous, and even bold, to lecture to you in your own language on a subject of that importance? Of all the faces which surround me not one was known to me before my coming here; the language I use is unfamiliar to me, and every word that I utter is, by its defective pronunciation, an appeal to your indulgence. I feel, however, more secure when I think of your far-famed

love for knowledge, of your hospitable spirit, and also when I bear in mind the great nation which you have welcomed in my person, and which, apart from the general interest it excites among all the peoples of the earth, is perhaps nearer to you than to any other by many old ties and everlasting sympathy.

I come here, to your calm and happy land, as the representative of a disturbed country and agitated times, like those travellers who, coming into temperate climates and under clement skies, talk of the earthquakes and storms of tropical regions. The political state of France, as regards its legal institutions, is not more steady than the state of the sky or of the sea. To describe the present political institutions of my country would be as useless and ungrateful a task as if I enlarged upon the weather which was prevailing when I left Paris. Who knows if, in the very moment when I describe a quiet and regular state of things, a tempest will not break forth and give the lie to my words? Since the Empire has sprung up again amongst us, it has unceasingly remodelled its own constitution, and by the side of that continuous change exists the daily possibility of a violent and sweeping revolution.

Therefore, instead of attempting to describe here that wavering and fickle aspect of our institutions and our laws, I shall try to draw the less uncertain picture of the moral state which brings forth those very institutions and laws, and by which their unsteadiness is explained. No change in the world has been more sudden, and, as far as the appearance goes, more complete, than the French Revolution of '89. The political state of France was destroyed, and its society overturned, by the same magic stroke; but with this profound difference, that the change from one social state to another has been effectually achieved, and that the new social order has proved henceforward immovable and above transformation, except by the slow course of nature, while the political change has consisted only in a series of destructions, which have left nothing yet but ruins. Our history since '89, so full of disorders and useless bloodshed, is the history of our long endeavour to find a good government. Any attempt, whether it came from the highest or from the lowest spheres, to shake the social order as established since '89, has failed; while any serious attempt to subvert the various governments existing since that time has

succeeded,—so solid is one of these two things and so frail is the other. It is not, however, that our social order has not been attacked more than once, as well as our governments. Napoleon the First tried to bring back some features of the old society by the institution of an aristocracy endowed with "*majorats*;" the governments of the Restoration made a more serious attempt in the same way by establishing an hereditary house of peers, a state religion, and trying to remodel our laws of inheritance. Now our social order has been as frequently assailed in the opposite direction, by socialist doctrines and socialist enterprise, from the plot of Babœuf during our first Republic downwards to that bloody fight of June 1848, which sealed the fate of our second one. But all those attempts, high or low, against French society, as it is, have failed, and have recoiled on their authors. On the contrary, the overthrow of a French government seems always an easy achievement, and is never an impossibility. Republics and monarchies, old and new, Bonaparte, Bourbon, d'Orleans, crumble upon each other with wonderful rapidity; and of those various governments and families there is but one, the d'Orleans, which

has not been put on its trial twice, as some wreck carried away and carried back again by the powerful tide of our revolutions. Such is the contrast between our society and our governments. It is like some granite foundation, upon which are hastily set up temporary shelters, and sometimes fine scenes appear, shaken by every breeze as long as they stand, and doomed to vanish as soon as the wind rises.

This frequency of political revolutions has brought in amongst us a moral state well worthy of attention, but rather difficult to understand thoroughly to any one who has not lived in it and felt it more or less prevalent in his own mind. The old habit of revolutions has led us to consider them without much fear, and, at the same time, the feeling of their uselessness has destroyed in us the desire of putting our hand to such a work. Therefore, when a revolution is suspected to be coming, and, as we are wont to say, when we feel it in the air, the great majority of the country is not truly in earnest either for it or against it. Not against it, because it is known that we are after all to get through it, and that it is not to be avoided, but rather met and paid off rightly, like a kind of political rent-day; not

for it either, because no real good is generally expected from a political revolution, after so many trials, and after the frequent failure of the loftiest hopes and of the noblest sacrifices. The nation is then like a man who would feel mysteriously bound to attempt, at certain times, to fly into the air, and who is then putting his foot on the window without much fear, as well as without any enthusiasm—knowing well, on one side, that the often-tried experiment will fail, but feeling sure, on the other side, that he will, as before, find himself on his feet, and not damaged too much by his fall. Thence comes the curious fact, that our revolutions are made by a handful of men, who are looked on by the country with more curiosity than passion, as the executors of some natural law, the application of which was, in some manner, foretold to all, like a coming storm, by the anxious and nervous state of the whole community. And such is our dearly-acquired familiarity with those political convulsions, that the most conservative of Frenchmen, and those who believe themselves in good faith through and through conservatives, are very easily caught uttering revolutionary doctrines, and considering unconsciously revolution-

ary acts as the most natural of deeds. The same man who is professing a general horror of revolutions, and teaching even to young people unreserved obedience to the powers that be, is heard the moment after hinting that if the Sovereign does such or such a thing, or calls to power such or such a man, he must have notice to quit—that he is lost or that he must go. In short, you cannot live in France, even in the middle of the most conservative classes, without being often reminded that you are in a revolutionary land, quite as, in far regions, the lightness of the constructions, and the general aspect of the soil, warn you that you are in a volcanic country.

If such is the perpetual unsteadiness of our political institutions, the cause of which can be found at will in the too visible faults of our successive governments since '89, or in the very difficulty of the problem to solve,—how is it, however, that the present government of France has lasted so long, and is standing still, with some apparent solidity, in the middle of rising agitation? That relative steadiness of so defective an establishment can be ascribed to three facts, which were not to be observed

under our former monarchical governments, and which are the main support of the present one. The first fact is, that the Imperial constitution is lawfully open to any modification indicated by the popular will, according to a proceeding very imperfect, but, however, effective enough, if worked with ability, to remove in time any serious subject of complaint. You remember that our monarchical constitutions were hitherto considered as final—that is, that the text of it could not be interfered with by any power, even by the parliament united with the king. Well, the Empire has retained from the inheritance of our ill-fated second Republic, the much better principle of modifiable constitutions, and has entrusted the Senate and the Sovereign, acting together, with that mighty prerogative. To be sure, that right of modifying at will the constitution, ascribed to the Senate and to the Emperor, without interference of the popular branch of the legislature, is, in the abstract, an abusive one, and could not be sustained in a free country; but in practice it is impossible for the Senate or the Emperor either to make or to refuse any constitutional alteration against the opinion of the representative house and of the nation; and, in fact, the

recent constitutional change which has re-established in France responsible ministers and parliamentary government, and which may be nearly considered as a kind of pacific revolution, has been effected by a hesitating Emperor and a reluctant Senate, under the pressure, and at the summons, of a liberal minority in our elective assembly. There is, therefore, no legal limit to constitutional reform and to political progress; and as to the temper of the Emperor, he has proved by that very concession of parliamentary government—to which he was sincerely averse, out of deep and old conviction, as well as by habit and love of personal power—that he will never recoil before any sacrifice of opinions, nor before any change of conduct, to take a popular grievance out of the hands of his enemies, and to conquer the goodwill of the country. That suppleness of the constitution and of the Sovereign are well known, in spite of a hostile press and of the ever-wavering mind of the Emperor, and tell upon the popular spirit and help to keep it down. The second fact, favourable to the maintenance of material order, is the increasing familiarity of the French people with universal suffrage and the

knowledge, spread now through the most revolutionary classes, that numbers can lawfully prevail and rule, and have their own will done, when they have intimated it by a significant vote. To be sure, that conviction of winning, with time and by the strength of a vote, anything against the ill-will of anybody, is not sufficient to eradicate revolutionary habits and propensities, and to discredit wholly the more summary, and apparently more effective, process of a revolution; but it contributes, however, to quell the fire and to teach patience, because, after all, patience has won already considerable reforms and partial success. The third fact, and last, which protects and supports the present government even more effectually than the two others, is the exaggerated fear of socialism, which fear is deeply set in the middle and upper classes, or *bourgeosie*, as we call them, and make them, this time, rather more apprehensive about a revolution, and careful to avoid it, than it was hitherto their habit and temper to be. The Imperial government is indebted to socialism for its very existence, because it is only the fear generally spread by the threats of socialism for the year 1852 which has opened the way for a

coup d'etat; and that debt of the Empire towards socialism is running still, because that same fear which has given birth to such a *régime* maintains it in spite of its many shortcomings and faults. French society is in fact above the eventual attacks of socialism, and that fear is ungrounded; but French imagination is not above the unceasing threats of socialism, and an ungrounded fear is a fear still.

If socialism was in France, as in some other countries, a mere doctrine, a philosophical or economical school, it would call legitimate attention, and not breed a kind of terror. After all, socialism is but a new word for a very old thing. It is but a quick feeling of the inequality of human conditions, and a vivid hope of levelling that inequality, which hope is easy to understand when one believes that the condition of men is made unequal by their own fault and by a wrong construction of human society, rather than by the overwhelming and perpetual necessity of a natural law. The conclusion that the inequality of conditions is only the work of our hands, and a bad work easy to undo if mankind becomes more clever and good, is most likely an

error; but, as to the painful feeling which the sight of that inequality provokes, and as to the wish to see it disappear from the earth, it is a natural, and by no means a reprehensible, inclination of human kindness. Hard work and miserable life, coupled together by the side of affluence and luxury, so often lavished upon idleness, is a dark and cruel problem which oppresses a benevolent heart. An honest workman, whose scanty means may be daily crushed under the *contre-coup* of some great speculation and failure in which he had no part, and from which he could reap no good; and still more a young girl, such as we see every day in our great towns, striving hard to earn her living, and too often beaten back into moral degradation and bodily bondage, are a trying sight for a philosopher, and call up painful and unanswered queries in his mind. The happiness of leading a free and secure life, of cultivating our mind, of giving to our sons all the intellectual and moral training which the age allows, of bringing up our daughters under the quiet roof of an inviolate home, and of adorning them with delicate arts and refined purity,—all these blessings are very far from being thrown within the reach of

all; and we are unworthy of them if we do not question ourselves sometimes about the justice of such a distribution, and if we do not feel some trouble when looking at so many of our fellow-creatures who stretch towards such goods wistful hearts and powerless hands.

But how to mend such a state of things?—Two ways only are open to progress in such matters: liberty and charity. Charity must be always at work, and it finds its ministers in these noble hearts of men, and more still of women, who feel for the sufferings of others more than for their own, and who labour under a kind of holy anxiety as long as they are not doing good. As to liberty, it is a debt of the law towards the poor man, and, in spite of popular prejudice, he is in want of it much more than the rich. In France formerly the mere fact of combining together in order to strike for a rise of wages or to form an association, was a misdemeanour indictable by law. Now, those two facts are lawful; strikes, trade-unions, co-operative associations, are developing themselves in our country as in your own, with their usual amount of error, excesses, and failures, but, however, with that invaluable advantage

that no workman can say or believe that there is between himself and the pursuit of happiness any obstacle arising from the state of the law. Add to that mending of our common law our universal suffrage, which, in spite of its numerous defects and dangers, assures to our workmen the privilege of getting, through the vote of our large towns, their own representatives into Parliament, and consequently the faculty of introducing and discussing there any measure intended for the special benefit of the working-classes, and I think that it completes the enumeration of the advantages or securities which socialism can fairly claim from the state. But French socialism puts forth less equitable claims, and entertains wider hopes. Two ideas have been impressed deeply in the mind of our ignorant classes, and have a powerful influence on their conduct. The first, which is the result of our own history since the Revolution, as well as before, is that the State, being equal to any task, can undertake our social regeneration and achieve it by legal decrees, as well as any other state-work; the second idea of our ignorant classes, impressed also in their mind by many remembrances and experiences too, is that the State in

France is an easy prey for any party daring and lucky enough to lay a firm hand upon it, and therefore the plan of seizing suddenly the state-power, and of enrolling it into the actual service of socialism, is a familiar thought and a favourite hope among our working classes. To be sure, the *coup d'etat* of 1852, so sudden and so decisive, was not made to discourage such false and dangerous ideas among the French people. On the contrary, since that time even more than before, state-power has been popularly considered as a kind of magic wand, which the detainer is now applying to bad uses, but which, once taken from him, and put in more truly socialist hands, will bring quickly and surely, not for France only but for the whole world, universal peace, absolute equality, and perfect happiness. Such is French socialism, with its candid confidence in state-power, and with its formidable faith in the efficacy of revolutionary enterprise. For those sectarians, all our revolutions since the end of the last century were intended to produce that immediate regeneration of the world, but have been maliciously diverted from that end by crafty designers and by corrupt leaders, so that the work is to be attempted again

with more resolution and vigilance than before. Such a belief is the source of those many socialist programmes and plans for a sudden renovation of the social order by state-decrees, which come up from time to time to public knowledge, and fill our middle classes with fear and disgust.

And in spite of those fears, in spite of the moral weakness which the republican party has contracted in its recent and absurd alliance with socialist doctrines and socialist hopes, there is ample room to foresee some violent commotion in France, if the life of the Emperor is long enough to allow him to reap the results of many faults. I am not here to sketch a history of the Second Empire, nor to discuss at length what ought or ought not to have been done to establish it on a firm and lasting foundation. Such a history would be the more useless, as I believe that a safer course in general policy would scarcely have brought better results, because personal government was a necessity for the Emperor during a certain number of years, as an unavoidable consequence of the *coup d'etat*, and personal government has in itself an ever-working and never-failing cause of ruin. The admirable institution of parliamentary government and

responsible ministries has indeed, when honestly and fairly practised, the unparalleled advantage of changing periodically the state of the political atmosphere, and of opening a safe issue to those moral storms which resemble so much, by their frequency and results, the convulsions of physical nature. Well, one of the dangers inherent to personal government, and the greatest one, is to shut up that safety-valve, and to leave one man facing perpetually the nation, while all these grievances, which the best government is sure to spread amongst men, are accumulating and pressing every day more and more upon one only head. Even Aristides tired out his countrymen by deserving too long to be called *the Just*. In France personal government did not run the risk of displeasing by its excess of wisdom and virtue, but it could not escape displeasing in a fixed time by the mere fact of its existence. When dissatisfaction did arise—and now it has arisen—when the many interests which any government, and especially a personal one, is exposed or rather obliged to damage by turns, are at last aroused and breed general discontent, then it is remembered, even by the most indifferent looker-on, that the origin of such a go-

vernment is a bad one, and cannot be forgiven. It is when our various governments have filled, rightly or not, the measure of public discontent, that the question of their origin is revived after a long sleep, and comes against them with renewed and unexpected strength. And that invidious question is unfortunately very easy to move with any one of our governments since '89, because every one of them has come into the world by an irregular way, in the middle of troubles and ruins. There is, however, a great difference as to invidiousness, between any government born of popular insurrection and anonymous bloodshed and a government issued from a cool and deliberate violation of public law, planned and achieved by one man against his solemn oath, and leading to the conquest of a crown. Popular and cheap accounts of the *coup d'etat* were in France the first use of the freedom of the press, and the most bitter war has been waged against the present government since that time on that ground; because every party is well aware, that to win the goodwill of a nation, and to move on crowds of followers, the words of public interest, general happiness, and even the loftier word of liberty, are not so

powerful as a well-sustained appeal to the eternal feeling of justice, and to the binding decrees of human conscience.

But let us leave aside difficult inquiring into a dark future, and without seeking to know by what ways and means the political state of France may be renovated, let us mark rather the main features of the changes which are most likely to come. And let us also, with some confidence in a favourable turn of human affairs, when trying to sketch what will be, take for our starting-point what our best men actually wish to do. Well, the main idea which prevails now in the liberal and enlightened part of the French people is that deep political reforms are wanted in our country, not so much in the external form and highest springs of our government, as in its internal working and administrative organisation. Centralisation, which was, even at a recent date in France, the tendency and nearly the mania of almost all our public men, has so much lost its ground in general opinion, that the conviction has come that it is impossible to establish political liberty in France with any chance of duration, if the many and tight links which bind the country are not unfastened for

ever by deep reforms in our administrative, judicial, and even religious system. After too long indifference to that question, light has come, and after light earnestness. It is felt now that the executive, in whatever hands it may be, monarchical or republican, is too powerful, and must be curtailed as to many of its overwhelming privileges; that liberty must at last be given to the Borough; that the Department must become master of itself in many things now left to the arbitrary will of Prefects, or rather Pashas, which the first Napoleon instituted with a marvellous instinct for despotism; that the neighbouring Departments must be allowed to combine together for certain purposes, and especially for the election, through their united councils, of the only Upper House which French democracy can now produce and bear. When such reforms are made—and they are sure to come—provincial political life, which is nearly extinct in France, will be renewed; important and able men will find in their own province useful and not inglorious employment, instead of crushing each other's hopes in Paris; and the blood of intellectual France, which is now dangerously affluent to the head of the country, leaving the body colourless and lifeless, will

be more justly distributed, and bear with it animation, movement, and healthy contentment, throughout the most distant members of that noble frame.

After our administrative system, if not before it, French justice demands and will obtain serious reform. It is wonderful that, after so many revolutions, our criminal justice has retained so much of the old inquisitorial system, and, still more, that, with such an intercourse between your country and mine, British proceedings are so wholly ignored amongst us. We are, indeed, indebted to you for the jury of judgment; but the grand jury does not exist among us, and, what is much worse, our protracted secret informations, our questioning an accused person held in secret confinement without counsel, our pressing and leading interrogatories of the same accused at the public trial, are a sad inheritance of the old French justice, to which our judicial body clings still with a regretable and stubborn obstinacy. If you could see the presidents of our assize-courts, honestly doing what they believe their duty, now fencing with the prisoner, and trying by all means to wrench from him a confession of his guilt, or to entangle him into self-contradictions; now interrogating

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the witnesses, and forcing answers, or rather whole stories, out of them, nine times out of ten on irrelevant matters, you would be struck with surprise, and you could scarcely understand how a liberal and generous people can admit such practices. If, however, I have waged a long war against such abuses, it is rather out of respect for the dignity of the nation than in the interest of the prisoners themselves. The evil is, in fact, corrected by the quickness of intellect and by the freedom of action of a French jury. Our juries are more powerful even than an English one, because they possess, through their privilege of stating that there are extenuating circumstances in the case (a statement to which the judge is bound by law to give effect on the spot), a kind of kingly right of showing mercy to a prisoner, even when they affirm his guilt. Nay, our juries do more,—they discard, not seldom, the sworn and uncontested evidence, to acquit a prisoner who has won their pity; and the heart of a French jury is moved easily, and always inclined to rebel against the hardness of the judge, at the risk of an excess in the other way. I daresay that the firmness of our jury would be better, and the administration of our

criminal law would improve, if our old practices, as far as the judicial interrogatories of prisoners and witnesses are concerned, had given way before the liberal spirit of the age and the noble example of our British neighbours. I cannot leave this subject of French justice without mentioning a reform even more important than the preceding one, and the coming of which can be delayed, but by no means avoided. I allude to our defective system of promoting judges from place to place, and from town to town, quite like other officials, by the free and unscrupulous hand of the executive. It was, indeed, very candid on the part of our legislators, if they ever believed that they did enough, to warrant the independence of a magistrate if they protected him against the chance of a dismissal, when at the same time they left him, without reserve, at the mercy of the executive for advancement in his career. But such an organisation is not due to the blunder of too candid a legislator; quite the reverse; it is one of the most clever devices of the first Napoleon—if we can rightly call clever the art of adapting even the sacred interests of justice to the ends of political despotism. That instrument, once contrived, has

worked well, and has fulfilled the hope of its maker. Of course we have many honourable magistrates who, settling for life in their own town, and leaving off any hope or wish of preferment, keep their independence above suspicion, and show it with a manly firmness, especially in those political and press trials which our present law has taken from the hands of the jury and has given over to the arbitrary judgment of our bench. But such exceptions confirm the rule, and whoever could sit for a day in the audience-room of our Minister of Justice would see there as many judges asking and suing for preferment as any other kind of officials in any other of our public offices. I remember myself having heard old Duke Pasquier, who died late under the Second Empire, after having served all our governments as a magistrate and as a minister of justice too, saying with sadly competent knowledge, —"Do not mention, as you do, tribunals and courts of first instance of appeal and cassation; say, rather, if you will speak exactly, the regiment of first instance, the regiment of appeal, and the regiment of cassation." Well, the liberal party, as a whole, republican as well as monarchical, is decided to mend

that state of things, first, by giving back to the jurisdiction of the jury any cause of a political character; by enlarging generally the jurisdiction of the jury, so as to reduce considerably the exaggerated number of our judges; and finally, by taking their preferment from the hands of the executive, and substituting for it a kind of co-optation by the courts themselves, and of presentation of candidates by some public bodies, as our neighbours the Belgians have wisely and successfully tried.

As to the relations between Church and State, it is one of our greatest political problems, but it must be solved, however difficult it may be. The Concordat which Napoleon the First forced upon the Court of Rome, has put the material interest of the Catholic Church in France under the hand of the State, but, morally speaking, the French Church is more than ever under the command of the Pope; and when the two powers are at war, as was the case in France some years ago, it is a sad spectacle to see our clergy anxiously seeking which of them it is their duty to obey. We have seen, when the quarrel between the Pope and the Emperor was at its height, poor country parsons deprived for a time of

their scanty salary, by the authority of the prefect, for the mere fact of having alluded in their preaching to the sufferings of the Pope. But the result for religion is still worse, and the damage to its credit much greater, when the French Church and the State agree on the general policy, seem to be allied, and are lending to each other public support. You know how deep and how bitter is the old dissent between the political tendency of the Catholic Church and the ideas of the French Revolution. As soon, therefore, as the State and the Church are seen to become nearer and live in better intelligence, a cry is raised that public liberty is in danger, and that the Catholic clergy, domineering over the State, will obtain, as in former times, the full sway of the land. Well, the idea of ending that perpetual entanglement between Church and State, and of effecting a complete and final separation between them, has made of late such progress in France, that the event will certainly come, either in a peaceful manner and with a just regard for legitimate interests, or amid the troubles and injustices of a revolution. As is usual in human affairs, the French Church on one side, and its enemies on the other, have a strong tendency to over-

step their rights in the case, and to exact more than their due: our clergy would certainly like to become wholly independent of the State, and have to deal thenceforwards with the Pope only, and to continue, however, receiving its salary and share of the Budget as a compensation for their formerly confiscated lands. On the other side, our radicals of every hue are strongly inclined to cut off the Church from the State as to salary, and to put it still more under the power of the State in any other matter, as a kind of public nuisance which cannot be too much watched and restrained. But the liberal party in the French Church, and the best portion of the liberal party out of it, are disposed to agree for a peaceful separation of Church and State upon truly liberal and equitable terms; and it is one of the difficult but noble and useful works which, I firmly hope, the present generation of Frenchmen will have the honour and happiness to achieve.

Such is the imperfect sketch of the administrative, judicial, and religious reforms which are the main parts of the programme of the French liberal party, considered as a whole, independently of its internal divisions as to the monarchical or republican

form of government. We are indebted indirectly, but unquestionably, for such a programme to the Second Empire itself, because we have been taught by it a severe but useful lesson on the inconveniences of administrative, judicial, and religious centralisation. To be sure, that excessive centralisation existed before, but under our various constitutional governments its inconveniences were made lighter, and its dangers were veiled by parliamentary interference and responsible ministers. Nay, such excessive centralisation was considered by the majority of our public men as inherent to French political manners, and as necessary to French greatness. It was only in 1852, when all our public liberties disappeared in one night, like the scenery of a theatre; when France, awakening from its slumber, found itself given over, like a conquered land, to prefects, generals, and irresponsible ministers; when no tribune, no free press, could interfere, as before, between the overwhelming power of the administration and the unprotected liberty of the citizen,—it was then only that every enlightened and liberal man in the country was struck with the problem, and, looking at it closely, saw that excessive centralisation was at the

root of the evil. And as if to make the lesson more effective, and to impress it more deeply on the rudest mind, we have seen during eighteen years that wonderful power of a centralised government used, like some irresistible weapon, for electoral purposes, and succeeding in reducing to electoral submission almost the whole population of the Empire. Then the lesson was complete, and we understood at last some words full of meaning which the Emperor himself had inserted into the preamble of his Constitution of 1852, which was only a slightly amended copy of the Consular and Imperial Constitution, well known under the name of Constitution of the year VIII. "I said to myself," wrote the Emperor in that preamble, "since France has been living till the present day with the administrative, judicial, and religious organisation of the First Empire, why should we believe that the political constitution of that time would not suit the country as well?" The Emperor was quite right thus far, that the administrative system of the First Empire, which France had kept till then, was a fit and solid basis for a despotic and not for a constitutional and liberal government; and, indeed, by his *coup d'etat* and Consti-

tution of 1852, he re-established a full harmony between that basis and the more visible part of the building. You know how that building itself is now crumbling down under the pressure of public opinion, and how its very constructor is trying now to remove it peaceably from the ground. But that long and painful experience has fixed our attention on the basis itself, and as we wish our liberty to stand and prosper, like your own, we are resolved to establish it now on the better foundation of administrative independence, religious freedom, and judicial integrity.

I have done now with that imperfect exposition of our present political state, and of our hopes for a better future. Whatever that future may be, I entreat you to judge us not too hastily nor too severely, doing our duty, as we try to do, in the midst of difficulties and troubles which you cannot realise, so far are they from the happy condition of your own political life. In those quiet islands political progress is going on hand-in-hand with public peace, and order and liberty are supporting each other under the light sway of a beloved and respected Sovereign. Not so in our distracted land. We live still under the hard law of old times, that hard, unwritten, but unshaken

law, which recites that man must earn his bread with his sweat, and his liberty with his blood. Such deep differences between the conditions which rule in every country the difficult and holy work of civilisation and progress, must be kindly considered and taken into great account by the enlightened minds of every nation, when they are looking at the conduct of their neighbours, and tempted to pass judgment upon them. For myself, I am rather inclined to consider the truly enlightened part of each people as a portion of a certain noble nation without a name, whose citizens, untied by blood but united by spirit, are scattered all over the earth, with the duty of feeling always for each other, and of helping each other for good. It is that comforting thought which has inspired me with the courage of addressing you, not as a foreigner, but rather as a fellow-citizen in that anonymous but living nation of well-wishers to mankind, and of claiming your sympathy for my dear and long-tried country.

II.

ON THE SOCIAL STATE OF FRANCE.

I CANNOT attempt, even when favoured with your kindest attention, to dwell at length upon such a vast subject, nor to follow it out in its many details; my plan will be therefore to go at a rapid pace through the various classes of French society, marking on the way the special character of each of those classes, and then to sketch some comprehensive views of the French character as a whole, that is, of the tendencies and ideas truly national, and consequently held in common by the various classes of the community.

I shall naturally look first at the large and solid basis of French society, and speak first of that man who is bearing nearly the whole weight of our social fabric, who pays the greatest bulk of our taxes, and especially of that heavy one which we call in France the blood-tax, that is, the military service; who is, in

short, or at least who has been up to the present day, by his conservative spirit and slowness of motion, a kind of ballast for our country, and a counterpoise to the levity of the upper classes,—I mean the French peasant.

The excessive partition of our soil—saving a few exceptions, caused generally by the nature of the ground or by the necessity of cultivation—is, as you know, the most striking feature of rural France. The important consequence of such a leading fact cannot escape your attention : our nation of peasants is, as a whole, a nation of meritorious and hard-working proprietors, and, as such, little open to the influence of the comparatively few great landowners who contrive to subsist; but it is, at the same time, a nation of *small* proprietors, and, as such, they are timid, and without moral or physical strength to stand, in case of need, against the government. Therefore they are, on one side, indifferent, and even, in some parts of the country, hostile to the great landowners, who are always in want of hands for their culture; but, on the other side, they are weak and submissive in the extreme to the central government.

"The influence of the government is all-powerful on the French peasant—first, because it is unrivalled, and is the only one which weighs effectually upon him. The French peasant has no lord to reverence or fear; on the whole, the priests, except in some parts of the country, are nothing to him; and, most often, he does not go to church, and waits for his wife outside, talking and marketing with his neighbours. But he has a master well known to him, and the only one he knows, the State, or, to speak more exactly, the Executive, which rules his life, and lords it over his mind with full and ever-present ascendency. Regular payment of taxes, submission to military service, ready obedience to any representative—high or low—of the Executive, have entered so deeply into the habits of the French peasant, and are so impressed upon his mind, that he does not consider even the possibility of acting otherwise. It is the State who chooses his justices of peace, and can revoke them, who sends a schoolmaster to his village, brings up and educates his child for a trifle, and generally for nothing; who, some years later, calls up that same child, looks him through to know if he can be turned into a good soldier, and

then takes him for nine years. It is the State who sends to him the tax-collector, and sometimes gives him back part of his money if he has suffered too much from hail or inundation; it is the State who comes to the rescue of his poor village if a bridge, a church, a road, is wanted, or who refuses occasionally his help, and lets things stand as they are; it is the State at last who is represented by those two smart-looking, keen-eyed, and ubiquitous *gendarmes*, riding every day from village to village, stopping at the peasant's abode, asking him what he thinks or what he knows; acting as his best protectors and true friends in quiet times, but ready to overawe him and to bully him to the poll when the electoral business has begun.

That State is the modern centralised State born of the French Revolution, and which, from the Convention down to Napoleon III., has made its power felt and obeyed in the remotest villages. But that modern State has inherited, so to speak, the unseen treasure of obedience and fear which has been accumulated in the heart of the French peasant by centuries of feudal despotism. I don't know if there has ever been in the long story of human injustices a

more oppressed and more miserable being than the French peasant in feudal times. The towns and the large boroughs could stand against feudal oppression, and usually succeeded in defeating it with the help of royal power. It was not so in the rural part of the country; and the many servitudes which, up to the last day of the old *régime*, were weighing still on the French peasant, are surprising and painful to mention. The noble was considered by the peasant as an ever-dangerous enemy, with whom nothing was to be done except to obey and suffer, or to elude obedience by some clever device. The rich *bourgeois*, and especially the public functionary, or, more broadly speaking, any one dressed in black cloth, has inherited something of the prestige of the noble in this respect, that the very sight of him inspires the French peasant with distrust, and breeds silence. To avoid talking with a gentleman, or at least to give only equivocal or dubious answers, and, above all, not to be enticed into uttering clearly a *Yes* or a *No*, is the first article of a peasant's creed, and the most deeply impressed maxim of rural wisdom. To escape that temptation of giving a *Yes* or a *No* to a gentleman, the French peasant will rather affect an obtuseness

of mind or a silliness which is far from him indeed; but the blood of his oppressed ancestors, which runs still in his veins, has taught him to make little of his own vanity if he can only escape damage. Every one of them seems imbued with the intensely French maxim of our great fabulist La Fontaine: "Our master is our true enemy; I tell it you in good plain French."

It is that peasantry which our revolution of 1848 has suddenly called to political life, and pushed on to the polling-box, by the unexpected institution of universal suffrage. In spite of the great public misfortunes which have arisen out of such an unprepared and uncalled-for event, some good results were thereby attained. The first was to instil, by electoral agitation, a certain life into that inert part of the nation; the second advantage was to make our educated classes truly familiar for the first time with the intellectual and moral state of our peasantry, and alive to the necessity of elevating our rural population, in fact as well as in right, to the rank of citizens.

The rural canvassing, which universal suffrage has imposed on us, has, so to speak, revealed one half of France to the other half, and it has been only

when canvassed as a voter that the French peasant has made himself wholly known. What a discovery it was to many eminent Frenchmen who had believed themselves till then quite conversant with the matter! How impatient and indignant were the liberal candidates when they felt that the peasant elector could by no means be brought to the astounding idea that he was free to vote as he would like! And, indeed, if we look at the thing closely, the more stolid of the two was the candidate, for the peasant was right in his own instinct that his vote could not be free. When the peasant was showing such candid surprise and such trouble of mind at the mere suggestion that he could contradict, and even irritate, by his vote that same Executive under the hand of which he spent his humble life, and which he respected and feared in the humblest of its officials, he was more in the right, and understood much better his own situation, than the learned candidate who professed to be scandalised by such stolidness and such timidity. Indeed, with our innumerable administrative regulations and bye-laws, even for rural life, and with constant prosecutions impending on his head for petty offences before petty judges, the peasant was too well

aware that, for the short pleasure of having voted one day as he liked, or rather as M. So-and-so liked, he would incur for six years a kind of administrative excommunication much more real and more damaging to him than any one which could come from Rome. It is rare that any situation which lasts a certain time in this world does not bring forth some celebrated word or saying, which is retained by public memory, and sums up that situation for years to come. Well, it happened at the trial of a mayor that a letter was produced written by him to the village constable intrusted with the care of repressing the trespasses of the cattle on forbidden ground, and to move prosecutions against the peasants for that kind of offence. "Mind," said the mayor in that letter, "not to make any confusion between the poultry of the friends and the poultry of the enemies of the government." That invaluable sentence has startled the whole country as a candid expression of an important truth, and has instantly become a proverb never to be forgotten.

To this natural timidity of our rural voters must be added their extraordinary ignorance, and also their most frequent indifference as to the result of the whole proceeding. Of that ignorance, the most

amusing, and, at the same time, the most striking instances have been frequently given, and I will not insist upon them, because, although redeemed by many qualities, and more than one virtue, such blots on our national fame I like better to leave aside. I remember, however, a candidate telling a rural voter (unable to read, as they mostly are) that he had in hand the *bad* ticket, that meant naturally the ticket of the rival candidate, and then he gave to the peasant the right one, that is, his own ticket. Well, coming after the poll and meeting the candidate, "I have put your own ticket, the *good* one, into the box," said he to him, "but fancy what a good trick I have played with the *bad* one: I have given it to that stupid fellow Jack, and he has put it into the box. Is it not nice?" That expression, the *bad* ticket, is freely used among our country voters, but the word has for them a special sense; it means for them the ticket which is likely to bring trouble to the man who has put it into the ballot-box—the ticket which is likely to set him, or his servant, or his poultry, as you have seen, at war with the administration. You will not be surprised, therefore, to learn that the opposition ticket is ordinarily styled,

by the authorities first, and by the rural voters afterward, the *bad* ticket.

As to the general indifference of country voters as to the result of the elections, it is founded on very old experience, coupled with hereditary resignation, and it is not, in fact, so unreasonable as it seems to be. An aged peasant, whom I was once canvassing without hope, and merely for the sake of information, and from a feeling of duty, had a fit of sincerity, which is too rare among them, and addressed to me this homely speech—"I hear all the candidates, but I never vote for the Parliament, and never will. Why should I vote? You, gentlemen of Paris, you quarrel among yourselves who is to govern, but for me it is quite the same: taxes, military service, will go on as usual; and as to the general conduct of affairs, it is never so good as one party promises, nor so bad as the other party threatens. Therefore, I feel not only unable to understand these things, but still more unable to influence them." And as I was urging, with the obstinacy of a canvasser, that general policy was something, and was paid for, when it was badly conducted, by more money and more soldiers, he answered with a sad smile: "I am an old

man, sir, and I know the law well. When my son is twenty years old I look at him as no more my own, but as appertaining to the State as a soldier. If by chance he is left to me, I consider it as an unexpected blessing, but never as something due."

I am far from quarrelling with such a state of mind, which guarantees the external safety of our land; and I felt as if I had unduly interfered with that absolute obedience to our recruiting law, which is still the basis of French greatness; but it must be confessed that such rural opinions on the general policy, and on the result of a vote, are scarcely compatible with a sensible and profitable use of universal suffrage. A change is coming, however, in that respect, and has made itself to be felt already in some of our rural elections. The democratical party is now hitting hard at the taxes and the army, and, when canvassing a rural election, they unceasingly harp on that only string. They have begun to impress on the mind of the rural voter that he could truly do something to throw off, or at least to alleviate, that old yoke, and if that belief takes hold of the peasant's mind, universal suffrage will

threaten the country with a new and unforeseen danger. It will be the increasing difficulty of purveying to the true wants of the State. Our French peasant is not at all a socialist. He is too fond of land generally, and of his own land in particular, to hear much of socialist doctrines; but, shut up as he is in village interest and village views, it is out of traditional docility, and not at all by a free acquiescence of his mind, that he now supplies the necessary wants of the State; and if he feels himself the master, as he lawfully and really is, he will be certainly the most avaricious of masters, and he will incline to treat the State as my celebrated countryman, the Gascon, treated his horse when he resolved that he would teach the poor animal to live without eating.

Let us now get out of the village, and enter a small French town. Nothing, at first sight, is more dreary and more empty, except when industry and factories have invaded them. But, industrious or not, lively or not, those towns of second and third rate rank have this common character, that every class is living there apart, or secluded from the other, without being connected by any of those ties which the habit

of public life and political intercourse have woven between the various classes in your country. If there is in such towns a population of workmen, they live apart under republican influences: the shop-keepers alike club together, and form the most reasonable and most timid and quiet part of the town. Now there is in almost all these towns some remnant of our old aristocracy, generally poor, powerless, and proud, which is more and more losing its ground by its inaction, and by the slow but sure effect of our law of inheritance, uselessly counteracted by many endeavours. Now and then a golden dew comes and revives some of these decaying families, through the channel of a marriage, or, as it is called, a *mésalliance*, with some rich commercial family: for old titles are at once laughed at and sought for in France, as in many democratical countries. But those occasional prizes are overbalanced by the exaggerated expenses of the young provincial nobles, who are induced by their idleness, and mostly by the very dulness of provincial life, either to come to Paris, and be ruined swiftly there, or to become gamblers in their own town; and then they lose fortunes in such dreary and melancholy clubs,

that to remain there one only night is in itself a punishment. In the middle of these various classes, having some relation with all, but keeping apart as a whole, is what is called the *colony*. It is that rather large army of removable ("amovible") functionaries, which the Executive keeps for its own service in every provincial town. The *colony* consists of government teachers and government advocates, receivers of taxes, administrators of all kinds, garrison-officers,—all of which are entertaining one only hope, that is to advance in their career, and consequently to move on, and to leave the place where they are living. That always moving and changing part of the population leaves now and then some hostage, who gets fixed in the town,—now a youth who happens to marry there, or some official who wrecks there, and is stopped in preferment till he retires; but, as a rule, the *colony* is in perpetual motion, and takes no interest whatever in the town apart from its special and professional duties. You understand easily that in a town composed of such elements, there are no associations for such or such useful works, no enterprises or meetings of any sort, no trace whatever of that public life which is constantly stirring in your British towns. The

general elections come in their time, and give to these French provincial towns a short excitement, a kind of convulsive start, after which comes again that dull and unhealthy sleep which reminds one of death.

There is, however, in these provincial towns, or rather above them, something which never changes nor moves, but which also never sleeps : it is the Catholic Church, much more powerful there than in the wholly rural districts. When you get up to some place where you can obtain a full view of the town, and when you ask an inhabitant to tell you the name of the buildings which attract mostly your attention, by their importance, their impressive bulk, their apparent wealth, you may feel assured that you have hit upon properties belonging directly to the Catholic Church, or having at least something to do with Catholic purposes. It is the palace of the bishop, or the great seminary, a special school for breeding priests, or the inferior seminary, which is a priestly school for common education, and a number, increasing every day, of convents, which are mostly new and scarcely completed. In short, the material proofs of that intense life and renewed power of the Catholic Church,

which you do not see in Paris, nor in our rural districts, are abundant in our provincial towns, and force themselves there upon one's attention.

That power of the Catholic Church has been on the increase for thirty years or so, and the clerical influence has wonderfully progressed during that period among that same French *Bourgeoisie*, upper and lower, which had formerly thrown off so decidedly its allegiance to the Catholic Church. All aged persons in our provincial "*Bourgeoisie*" have a vivid remembrance of a time when nearly all the considerable families of the town lived far from the Church, and did not interfere in its affairs or creed, even to oppose it,—when no importance was attached to religious matters. A great change has come; it is deemed now, in provincial life, a blemish and a fault, not only if you are an opponent to the Church, but even if you are not reckoned among its supporters and friends. The old *Voltairianism*, as it was termed, has disappeared from our upper and middle provincial classes, to subsist only in a part of the youth, where it becomes mere materialism or positivism, and also among the workmen, where unbelieving is only one of the forms of the great struggle still raging between the Catholic

Church and the Revolution. The wealth of the Catholic Church in France has naturally increased, keeping pace with its rising credit in our middle classes, because it is a law of human nature that any spiritual influence, when it is in progress, is soon surrounded with material power, and any idea which succeeds well in the world is sure to work out a kind of visible and tangible body of its own, that is to acquire temporal influence and to accumulate worldly riches.

To what cause, however, must be ascribed that great change in the moral and social situation of Catholicism in France? It is to a political cause, for, in spite of all appearances, the political question dominates, and has long dominated, all other questions in our country. Well, the time of the bitterest opposition of our middle classes against the Catholic Church is the time of the Restoration—that is, when the royal government was seen in close alliance with the Church, and when both seemed intent to wage a common and deadly war against the most legitimate interests issuing from and connected with the French Revolution. "The altar and the throne," as it was then said, were enveloped in the

same unpopularity, and it is still remembered that, in 1830, a Catholic priest could scarcely show himself in the street. Under the government of King Louis Philippe, the well-known indifference of the State towards the Church let the things take their natural course; and then many in the middle classes, being no more afraid of aristocratical or clerical influence, returned to religion, or began to ape the nobility by showing goodwill to the Church. But the most decided move of our upper and middle classes towards the Catholic Church, has been determined by the resentment and fear which the revolution of February 1848, and the threats of socialism, had spread through the conservative part of the nation. It is the conservative reaction against socialism which has mostly revivified clerical influence in France, and that Catholic feeling was so much excited by the events which occurred in Italy, and by the dangers to which Papacy was exposed, that the Emperor was obliged to stop short, and to give up or postpone his designs as to the abolishment or transformation of the temporal power.

But in the same manner as our conservative classes were induced to return to Catholic tendencies,

and to foster Catholic interests, our revolutionary classes, and the democratical party at large, began again, as of old, to consider the Catholic Church as their most powerful and their bitterest enemy. The old struggle between the revolution and the Catholic Church has arisen afresh, and was in no time so virulent as it is now. The revolutionary polemic against the Church, and consequently against religion in a general sense—because they do not recognise nor have at hand any other form of religion—is unceasing, and goes down to the lowest level of the population. It is now a rule, and nearly a patriotic obligation, among Democrats, to forbid, by a last will, at their funeral, those religious ceremonies which in Catholic countries are so important in the eyes of the public. It is precisely for that alleged importance that our Democrats affect to dispense with them as a token of their anti-Catholic faith. The most severe and exacting Republicans have forgiven our celebrated writer, Sainte-Beuve, his being a senator, in consideration of his firm refusal to have anything to do with the Church; and they have followed to his last abode a man whom they had hated, despised, and denounced during all his life, only because cross and

priests were not to be seen there. Therefore, in spite of its moral and material progresses among the conservative classes, the Catholic Church is in danger, when and if a new revolution comes. Its best chance is, then, to be cut away from the State, and left free as well as unpaid; but there are chances also of its being, at least for a short time, treated as a public enemy, not as to its members, but as to its liberties and properties.

What is, however, in itself that Catholic French Church which has such an influence on our social state, and is so much involved in our political distractions? That Church, as all human institutions, is a compound of moral greatness and moral miseries, and when looked at closely it is easy to understand the admiration and devotion as well as the hatred it inspires. That Church asks from its ministers a self-denial which may be considered as above, or—if one likes it better—out of the ordinary reach of mankind. That superhuman self-denial imposed by the Catholic Church on its ministers is not, of course, of an easy attainment; and when it fails, the moral degradation is, according to the general law of nature, the greater and the deeper for the very effort which has been

attempted. It is an old saying of our great writer Pascal, that when we try to be like angels we run the risk of falling to the level of beasts. Well, sometimes that ideal goodness, that superhuman self-denial, is worked by the Catholic Church out of our human clay, and then the sight of such moral beauty is surprising and impressive even to the lightest mind. When a poor parish priest, in a rural district, is working for his flock in deep poverty, in cold solitude, in silent charity, in the absolute deprivation of anything which can soften and alleviate the burden of human life, and when he is come really to that point of living only for his fellow-creatures, and not one moment for himself, we feel that the limits of natural virtue and of human goodness are rather overstepped, because self-denial is, after all, the true and singular privilege of our kind in this world, and the farther it goes, the nearer up we come to that mysterious perfection which we feel vaguely to be our end. Such parish priests as these are not seldom to be found in our country, where the clergy is mostly recruited from the peasantry, and brings with it, for good as well as for evil, a kind of popular and ever-fresh energy.

The Church keeps its strength still in France because the conduct of our clergy is generally good, because the women, who are invested in our country with a great social influence, are mostly and earnestly attached to the Church, and also because Christian and natural virtues, blended as they are with religion, envelope and sustain the Catholic Church, as the ivy which clings with ever new and protective tenacity to some old and decaying construction. It is not in this truly Christian country that I shall lose time in proving that religion, being a natural as well as a noble want to mankind, a certain form of religion, whatever it may be, cannot leave altogether a country if it is not eventually replaced by another. In France, any change from one form of religious worship to another is of the greatest difficulty, because theological questions do not stand much before general attention, and religion, in our country, consists much more in a religious feeling than in a clear and firm adhesion to such or such articles of faith. It is for that reason that the Pope and the Church of Rome can introduce almost any novelty they choose in matters of faith without moving at all the French Catholic flock as a whole, and

running any risk of creating a schism on such matters. It is rather when interfering with politics, and cursing modern society and liberal institutions of all kinds, that the Church of Rome gets into trouble with its French followers; but our liberal Catholics, who are by far the most eminent, and able, and well-minded members of the French Church, come then to the rescue, and explain away those too frequent condemnations of the Pope, in a manner so soft and so clever, that they reduce them to nothing, without incurring themselves too openly the dangerous displeasure of Rome.

Let me now take you into that Paris which is looked at by many foreigners as being in itself the whole of France. Nor is it an erroneous impression altogether, if you bear in mind the excessive influence of Paris upon our national destiny. Paris is the greatest factory town of the country, the first commercial town also, and moreover it concentrates in itself the liberal professions and political interests of the country to such a degree that our provinces are in that sense languishing and nearly exhausted. It is therefore a complete and mighty representative of France, a kind of *microcosm* of

national life, and, as such, its acknowledged domination is not so really unjust as one might believe. As to the revolutions, for example, which are the most serious reproaches ever made against Paris, it is true that the domination of Paris over the country in that special matter is unjust, when Paris itself is under the domination of its lowest classes, as it happened in 1793, and as it might have happened again if the socialist insurrection of 1848 had unfortunately succeeded; but when a revolution is the common work of the various classes of our capital, as in 1830 for example, it may be said then that Paris has been on such occurrences the representative, or, to speak more exactly, the Executive power of French opinion, which could not make itself felt nor obeyed in a more regular way. Now it is rare that a Parisian revolution can succeed as the exclusive attempt and work of the democratic party leading our working-classes to fight. Something more is wanted for success; it is the help, the sympathy, or at least the silent but previous acquiescence, of our middle classes. In fact, Paris is not in the hands of our workmen, unless our middle classes—quite disgusted with the government of the day, and unable to change it by peaceable means—let the

lower classes loose upon it as the only possible executors of a kind of unwritten national decree. Then, and then only, the army, which feels that the opinion of the middle classes is not for the government, is apt to let it fall, after having stood a certain time for the honour of the flag. Let us hope that a sincere, full, and honest practice of constitutional government will soon relegate such facts among remembrances of the past, and that I am a historian rather than a prophet, when I explain to you the mechanism of our Parisian revolutions.

In the same manner as Paris is not, as it is too often believed, in the hands of its workmen, it is not exclusively a pleasure-town, as one is apt to think who looks only at the external face of it. It is quite true that Paris is the real capital and centre of pleasure-seekers from all the parts of the world. But what distinguishes mostly Parisian pleasure from European or American pleasure, what makes it appear more domineering and more absorbing than it is—quite as if pleasure had swallowed up all other forms and pursuits of Parisian life—is that pleasure in Paris is surrounded with a special, noisy, and wonderful publicity, without rival or even analogy in any other

capital; it is also because pleasure in Paris is more mingled and interwoven with intellectual and artistic amusement than in any other region of the earth.

As to the publicity, first, which attaches itself in Paris to any thing or to any man connected with pleasure, it has of late—and especially when the political press was so languid under perpetual danger—overstepped all imaginable boundaries. Three or four great newspapers, followed by innumerable minor satellites, give to the public every morning the most trifling and even the most personal and private incident of the life of any man or woman connected with what is called the pleasure-world. We have thus in Paris between one and two thousand persons who are not allowed to live for themselves even if they would, and whose actions, relations, friendships, quarrels, dressing, words, hints, and even intentions, are printed and sent unceasingly, not only through Paris and France, but through all the nations of the earth, who stare at such news, and believe that the whole of Paris has turned mad. That perpetual and minute account of that so-called pleasure-world is assiduously read by every class of people; it goes and finds out the most quiet and modest citizen in

his house, the workman or the needle-girl in their garrets, and gives to the Parisian vanity, and misconduct, and folly, the whole nation, nay, all the nations, as an audience. A law has been recently passed to stop that disorder, and it has declared a misdemeanour any intrusions of the press in private life; but it could never be put in force, because the very authors of that law continued to relish openly that kind of reading, and because many Frenchmen are so fond of publicity, that they prefer, even for themselves, slander to silence.

Now, it must be acknowledged that intellectual and artistic pleasure is never or very seldom separated in Paris from other and less noble amusements. The Parisian theatre, for example, is adorned every winter with two or three new plays, which, with all their defects, are delicate works of art,—mostly constructed with the utmost ability, and sometimes full of true genius. The coming out of a new play, in one of our literary theatres, is quite an event for the town, and even for the country. A brilliant audience, composed of play-writers, play-critics, habitual play-goers, and also of the *élite* of that pleasure-world which I mentioned before, is

called on to judge the new play, and form a kind of special jury, which is not easily conquered, so great is its double experience of true life and theatrical life, coupled with natural and acquired acuteness of mind. But a success, when decidedly obtained before such a public, is a victory which carries all before it. When I left Paris, a new play, given with great applause at the *Gymnase*, was enough to balance fully the interest of the coming Parisian elections; and a month or two before, a statue exhibited at the new Opera-house, praised as vividly by a part of the public as it was censured by the other, brought on a kind of small civil war.

But if one wishes at last to know where the true Paris lies, as concerns its real strength and ascendency on the country, one must look above our working-classes, and directly under that external and brilliant cover which we have called our pleasure-world. There is the Parisian *Bourgeoisie*, much more enlightened than our provincial middle classes, free from prejudices of any kind, active and thrifty, honest, intelligent, friendly to progress, sensible in all things, far from indifferent to science, literature, and art, but well-tempered and well-ordered in all its

tastes: in short, it is the moral reserve of our national good sense and national spirit. It is sometimes too timid, although intent on public good; it is apt to let itself be forgotten too long, and it is rather slow to move; but as soon as it is fairly aroused, it is felt to be the ruling power in the country, by its moral and material weight, its wisdom, and its wealth.

It is there that may be seen those especially general features of the national character which are to be found at various degrees, but less distinct and less clear in the other classes. When one looks at the French, and especially Parisian *Bourgeoisie*, more closely, one discovers easily that the Frenchman, who seems so bold in political experiment only for the difficulty of hitting on a good government, is, at the same time, careful, and even timid, in all other matters, and in the usual train of life. General prudence, and the desire, not so much of wealth as of a quiet and sure competency, is the main feature of French temper. The children are loved in France with a tenderness often excessive, and the law of equal inheritance, which has become a part of our national character, renders the Frenchman

still more prudent, from the perpetual anxiety which he feels about the future of his family. Now, if you bear in mind that all French inheritance, real or personal estate, is constantly divided in equal portions amongst the children, that they have no India nor Australia to go to, and that emigration is generally considered as a kind of penalty or desperate remedy for great faults, you will at once understand the cause of the two facts which separate most deeply the French family from the British one,—to wit, the small number of children, and our peculiar way of contracting marriages. On the small number of children I won't dwell here; but a curious fact is, that the apprehension about bringing up children keeps pace among us with the acquisition and increase of property. Our peasant, as a landowner, does not like to see its lot dwindling to nothing after him, and dreads a large family, and the same feeling pervades all classes. As to our marriage customs, they must be also attributed in a great measure to the constant wish of securing, as far as possible, the future state of the children against the results of equal partition. It is with such a view that money is so much taken into account for our

marriages, which are most often settled like a business matter by the parents or legal advisers of the family. Therefore, what is called a *marriage de raison*—that is a marriage which a reasonable interest has decided—is most frequent in France, and is a kind of moral law of the land. The inconveniences of that custom are well known: a great deal of human happiness, which might otherwise have come into existence, is thus crushed in the bud, and our youth is too often deprived, on the entrance of married life, of those exquisite feelings which, even when they are gone, give us a help for crossing the hard after-life, in the same manner as the remembrance of some delightful dream helps us to go through a painful or dreary day. On the other side, you must not believe one-hundredth part of what is alleged by our sensational novel-writers or scandal-newspapers about the disordered state of French married life. The French family is far from being worse than elsewhere, and, as a rule, it is solid and holds fast through some troubles. First, the excessive love for children maintains and protects the family; then the impossibility of divorcing engages husband and wife to mutual indulgence and support;

finally, the French women have generally a mind more clear than their heart is warm, and the same self-control which has enabled them to contract what is called a reasonable marriage, enables them also to make the best of it.

Our nation is, indeed, in spite of many appearances to the contrary, a reasonable one, and much less led by fancy than has been said and believed. A Frenchman has seldom earnest or deep ambition either for real power or for wealth. He is rather ambitious for fame, for praise, for giving a lofty idea of himself to his countrymen or even to his narrow circle; and he will be in fact consoled easily for many shortcomings, if he know only that those around him believe his merit superior to his fortune. He submits more easily than is the case here to failure in his worldly hopes, and it is rather rare that a Frenchman who has lost his fortune tries to build it up again two or three times, as it is often seen here or in America. He is rather inclined to accept his fate, and to alleviate it by his lively temper, and by a happy facility to enjoy any good thing which civilisation or nature may still bless him with. The name of *philosopher*, in its popular acceptation of a man easy to content,

is more truly and more often deserved in our country than in any other land. If our passions are quick, they are short, and do not affect too deeply nor too long our freedom of judgment. I dare say, indeed, that if equal conditions are given, a Frenchman is apt to feel the pleasant things more intensely, and the painful ones less bitterly, than the other denizens of this world.

And amongst these pleasures which my countrymen are so apt to enjoy, and which alleviate so much for them, even in adversity, the burden of life, I may give the first rank, with something like national pride, to the pleasures of the mind. France, as a whole, is fond of genius, especially in letters, and is wonderfully quick to mark out and to cheer on by public favour any writer who is likely to enlarge the mental enjoyments of the nation, or to add something to its fame. And, what is more laudable still, political struggles and passions do not blind on such matters the acuteness and justice of public judgment. We like to see our own opinions opposed with talent, and unpopular tendencies are not at all a bar to popularity, if they are defended with wit and eloquence. Nay, we go farther still : there is amongst

us a generous kind of partiality for any talented writer who is struggling against overwhelming material power. The chivalrous instinct of the nation, even when it lies dormant in dispirited times, is easily stirred up by the impression of that unequal fight, and comes to the rescue of the weak party who has enrolled justice and moral right on his side. The reward of such a public support is then more flattering, and more advantageous in the end, than any material favour or alleged honours which any existing authority may lavish on its friends. I have been, myself, a humble but faithful instance of the noble partiality of a French public in such circumstances, and I owe to that national tendency even the honour and pleasure of addressing you to-night; for how could my name have come over to you, and how could you have formed any wish to hear me, if that generous French spirit of which I was just speaking had not beforehand rewarded me with a repute so much above my merit? It is, therefore, with strict justice, that I must couple here my grateful thanks for your kind and honourable reception of me, with a respectful and heartfelt remembrance of the liberal spirit of my country.

THE END.

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